

POEMS, /

BY GEORGE DYER.

K

Come, my best friends, my books, and lead me on,

'Tis time that I were gone.

COWLEY.

Delectant domi, non impediunt foris.

CICERO.

Ω φθέγγμ' Ἀθάνας, φιλτάτης ἐμοὶ θεῶν,

Ὡς εὐμάδες σε, καὶ ἀποπλὸς ἦς, ἴμως

Φώνημ' ἀκῶ.

SOPHOCLES.

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P R E F A C E.

AN author never, perhaps, more naturally falls into anxiety, than on presenting the public with poetic compositions.

That poetry will allow no mediocrity, is a formidable principle of criticism; a principle, however, which, as laid down by an accurate critic and elegant poet, may be plausibly quoted, and even malignantly applied.

I grant, that I experience some portion of this anxiety at present: though I am by no means—how moderately soever I think of my talents—overawed by the strictness of that rule, and still less by the terror of malicious criticism. A person anxious to correct his mistakes, would be thankful to the true critic that candidly points them out: and why should the heart, that has full employment for its sensibilities, waste them on unworthy sub-

jects? A sufficient degree of generosity is found in the world to encourage a useful pursuit, and even an attempt to please: the violence of party cannot controul it; nor will it be overruled by the manoeuvrings of pride, or the feebleness of ignorance.

My anxiety may have an origin, to which the general maxim will not immediately apply; and on which private opinion would but remotely, and private malice not in the smallest degree, operate. It may proceed from a conviction, that a particular species of poetry hath its peculiar delicacy, and appropriate difficulties; or from an apprehension, that I may appear out of place, irregular, and inconsistent.

“But where lies the particular difficulty of lyrical poetry?” A question that may assuredly be asked: for such sort of compositions may be reckoned of slender contrivance, and easy of execution. And—it is true—any gentleman or lady may cap rhymes at their ease: as any child can blow bladders, or catch a ball in a cup, so may al-

most any trifler make mere verses; for measured lines, where genius, taste, sentiment and fancy, are no essentials, must obtain no higher appellation. They come from persons, who have, after all, a very indifferent ear for poetic melody: But, will they satisfy a correct or refined taste? Or, will what proceeds not from the heart, be likely to reach it? The most common occasions, however, will furnish materials for such compositions; and very moderate talents may give them correctness of shape, if not sprightliness of movement. Writers of this kind are, I know, soon pleased with themselves; and, Why should they not be permitted to be gratified with their own mechanisms, and apply such names to them as best suit their humour?

Yet, who are they*, that speak of the

* A modern poet, also, whom I am proud to call friend, speaks hastily concerning lyric poetry. But in p. 6. I allude to persons very different from him, who is a man of great genius, a very successful poet, and a most amiable man. Two of his friends have proved, that lyric poetry can do great things, and he himself allows it to be the most difficult species of poetry. Cowley thought it the most sublime.

easy composition of lyric poetry? Affuredly, not such, as have made any successful attempts that way themselves, or are properly acquainted with the opinions of others. Had they made more experiments, let me say, had they been more successful, they would have been better acquainted with their own imbecility. Had they been more conversant with the writings of others, they might have been taught—and such persons are inclined to be complaisant thinkers—some deference at least to the judgment of others. They would have been informed, that critics, and no bad ones, have pronounced lyric compositions to be more elegant in their structure, more lofty in their spirit, more difficult in their contrivance, than any other species of poetry; and that poets unite with critics in ascribing to it excellencies of the highest character.

When Pindar speaks of what more immediately characterizes his favourite measure, he uses expressions, that imply what is either the

most sweet and delightful in its nature, or the most intricate and perplexed in its formation*. How difficult Horace reckoned it appears from his Ode on Pindar†. And, though in his Art of Poetry he assigns to the lyric muse the most sprightly offices—and in such he was himself principally concerned—yet not till after he has challenged for it the most dignified distinctions‡. And how slow our two best English lyrists, Gray and Collins, were in their poetical movements, before they could seize an idea, which they thought sufficiently brilliant, or adapt to it language sufficiently impressive, is well known to all their readers §.

* Such as *ἄωτον γλυκὺν, ἄνθος ἀοιδῶν, ὕμνων ἄνθος, νέκταρ χυτὸν, ὕμνων πτύχαι, γλυκὺν καρπὸν φρενός, Θεόδματον χρεός,* &c. &c. Vid. Pindar's Odes passim.

† Lib. IV. Od. 2.

‡ *Musa dedit fidibus divos, puerosq. deorum,
Et pugilem victorem, et equum certamine primum,
Et juvenum curas, et libera vina referre.*

DE ARTE POET. 83.

§ See on this subject many of Gray's Letters, in Mason's Memoirs of that poet.

But, lest it should appear, that the poets are too complimentary to their darling pursuits, we should take with us what has been said by philosophers, and critics by profession.

The design of Aristotle, in his famous *Treatise**, being to exemplify dramatic and epic poetry, and more particularly as consisting in IMITATION, we must not look for much observation on the lyrical grace of the drama, though of this the Greek chorus was principally composed, and thither the tragedian directed all his poetic energy. The qualities, however, of the sublime, as laid down by Longinus, are such as must necessarily distinguish the ode, if it would support a genuine character. Nor was it at random, that of Sappho's two celebrated odes, one was produced by Longinus as a most perfect instance of sublime passion †; and the other, by Dionysius of Halycarnassus ‡,

* *Περὶ Ποιητικῆς.*

† *Περὶ Ὑψους*, p. 16, Edit. Pearc.

‡ *Περὶ Συνδέσεως ὀνομάτων*, p. 202. Edit. Upton.

as a singular example of graceful language, and elegant composition. Julius Scaliger, who, with his usual learning and copiousness, has written on the different orders of ancient poetry, assigns the nobleness of lyric poetry the next place to the majesty of the heroic*; and a critic of our own country has not scrupled to pronounce it the most exquisite and difficult of all†.

The subjects of odes, indeed, are frequently of ordinary occurrence; and the forms allow greater freedom, than any other species of poetic writing. But even subject and form, to harmonize with the temper of such writings, must be

* Julii Scaligeri Poetic. p. 117.

† Cum revera, si brevitatem excipiamus, omnium sit difficillimum, sicut et venustissimum. Trappi Prælectiones Poeticæ, p. 233.

The French poets and critics are not behind-hand in their testimonies. Boileau says of it,

L'ode avec plus d'éclat, et non moins énergie
Elevant jusqu'au ciel son vol ambitieux.

L'ART POÉTIQUE, Chant Second.

Rapin knows not where to stop.

Sur la Poétique, Pars Second, f. 30.

found in connexion with dignified sentiment, and polished language; with a brilliant imagination; with happy and beautiful analogies; with natural, often, with uncommon associations; and, when formed into a whole, may be considered, to borrow an expression from an Arabian * poet, like a string of pearls.

Hence it is, that the Ode, which is thought by some critics to be the most ancient species of poetry, was engaged, in the more early periods, in the service of the most lively and noble affections, of the grandest and sublimest representations. Poetry is more the language of nature, than is generally believed, and not peculiar to any people. Nations the most barbarous have yielded to its influence; they have all had their expressions of music, poetry, and dancing; attempts even at lyrical composition †. But the Asia-

* See Carlisle's translations from the Arabian poets.

† Several specimens of Norwegian, Swedish, Russian, Laplandish, and Icelandic ballads might be produced.

The observations made by Brown, in his History of the Origin and Progress of Poetry, from Pere Lafitau, on the

tics, to whom poetry, as well as the other elegant arts, are more particularly indebted, employed it on the most interesting occasions: they exercised upon it their gravest thoughts; they made it the vehicle of their most significant mysteries*; though their resemblances are often partial or bombastic, in proportion to the boldness of their metaphors and figures.

Nay, that ease, freedom, and unrestrainedness, which, it must be allowed, characterize lyric poetry, are not among its smallest difficulties. For, though smatterers in verse may think, that ease consists in negligence, and prettiness in insipidity; and, though their extravagance they may choose to call freedom; yet will such freedom either sink into obscurity, or swell into pompous barbarism. The ease of lyric poetry requires elegance; its freedom must possess energy; the boldness

American Savages, are confirmed by the voyages to Botany Bay, and Otaheite.

* Vide Lowth de Poes. Vet. Hebr. et Jonesii, Specimen Poes. Asiatic.

must reach sublimity. Qualities short of these are neither the *curious felicity* of Horace, nor the *happy boldness* of Pindar.

Thus excellent and thus difficult will lyric poetry appear, if we consider it abstractedly; nor will it be thought less excellent or less arduous, if we contemplate the characters of such writers, as have attempted it.

With respect to the Greek lyrists, (though no art is entitled to admiration merely for its antiquity) they are universally allowed to be most excellent. Sentiments, that are natural, will produce either the sweetness which delights, or the vigour which inspires: and these qualities supereminently distinguish the Greek lyrists*. The writers, too, enjoyed the advantage of a language, which, for richness, melodiousness, and variety, is unrivalled; and they managed it with a tone musically

* These are all published in a single volume by ÆMILIUS PORTUS.

exact; with a taste, inexpressibly, I had like to have said, philosophically, beautiful *. Their subjects, too, are general; which, by producing an universal interest, are calculated to produce the sublimest effect. One, and only one, is encomiastic; but, by mixing with his panegyrics sentiments, derived from general belief, and selected from national history, he seized a public passion; and stands without a rival, among lyric poets, in any age or country †.

The writer, who, among the Romans, unites in his own person almost all the beauties and varieties, of which the ode is susceptible, was Horace. Some, indeed, think that he has been extravagantly admired. But, without defending extravagant admiration, I still retain the belief, that, if a few of his compositions have no great *poetic character*, yet

* This observation extends to the Greek prose writers, as well as the writers of poetry; even they had the *Ποητικὴ καὶ μετὰ μουσικῆς οἰκεία θεωρία*. Dionys. Halicarnass. p. 124. Edit. Upton.

† Pindar.

the generality of them are either sublime or beautiful. In the variety of his subjects, and the polish of his versification, he has surpassed all the Roman writers; and, even in sublimity, he has, occasionally, exceeded most writers in the world. So that, notwithstanding the peculiar tenderness of Catullus, and the force of two or three modern Latin poets, Horace still retains the character, assumed, at first, by himself, and, since, confirmed to him by the testimony of the best critics*.

Of more modern nations, that have adopted the lyric measures, whatever may be affirmed, on calculating their general merit, their inferiority, in this department, to the Grecian and Roman poets, is universally admitted. The principal attempts made by the Italians appear in their operas and sonnets; of which, the

* *Romanæ Fidicen lyræ.*

The following panegyric is lofty, but not extravagant. *Inter veteres Latinos nullus est nobilis præter Horatium. Ille autem unus multis major: certe nullam habet literatus orbis poematum sylvam, illius odarum libris elegantia comparandam. Trappi Prælect. p. 243.*

former exhibit many shades of difference from that peculiar form of poetry, to which I am now alluding; the latter are too confined by the strict laws of measure, to go much beyond prettiness, and are in perpetual hazard of a kind of poetical prudery and affectation.

The earliest of the French poets were writers of odes. But of these, Marat advanced little farther than Triolets, Mascarades, and Rondeaux, a species of poetry that rarely admits greatness; and Ronsard's muse, with all her Grecian and Roman ornaments, is allowed to be pedantic and meretricious: nay, even such as succeeded these poets were frivolous, in comparison of the writers, whom they professedly imitated*. The true poet must possess some portion of originality.

* I here speak under shelter of the French critics themselves. Madame Dacier, Boileau, and Rapin, were all of this opinion.

Some of Madame and Mademoiselle Deshoulières' pieces, however, possess much of Sappho's exquisite softness: and some of Racine's and J. Baptiste Rousseau's odes reach the sublime. The odes I allude to are, the *Downfall of the*

From the specimens, lately introduced into this country, of the German, Spanish, and Portuguese poetry, it does not appear, that lyric poetry has been made the subject of their very serious pursuit. Clopstock, Remler, and Burger, have spirit, and genuine passion; but, from the knowledge that I possess of these matters—though I confess it to be slender—the lyrics of the Germans appear to me, too often, to recall the days of romance, rather than of taste: their wildness, frequently, hurries on to extravagance, and leaves you in darkness; or goblins, ghosts, and devils—a kind of harlequin machinery, neither pagan nor christian, the appendages of the grossest mythology, invented in the days of the darkest ignorance*—set aside the greater exertions of an inventive genius; supply the place of simple passion, and the sublime realities of na-

King of Babylon, from Isaiah, by Racine; translated, also, in the following volume; and a Poetical Paraphrase of Ezekiel by J. Baptiste Rousseau.

* See Olaus Magnus.

ture. This is still more true of the Spanish and Portuguese poets : their lyrical compositions are more often mere tales and stories, than odes; indicating rather the age of fancy, than of judgment; often interesting, often brilliant; but destitute of elegance, and scarcely ever reaching the sublime*.

Of the English lyrists, the first of any consideration is Cowley, a wonderful genius, unquestionably; but a writer always catching at brilliancy, and toiling, as it were, after wit; qualities, which should but sparingly be scattered on a spot, where elegance, spirit, and sublimity, should be the principal ornaments. Cowley's poetry, like flowers in too rich a soil, present you with beauty too soon acquired; and lose, proportionably, their strength and vigour. Cowley might have been one of the best writers in this department, but

* See the specimens of this poetry, as published by Robert Southey.

for those egregious puerilities, so justly condemned by Longinus :

His thoughts too closely on the reader press ;
He more had pleas'd us, had he pleas'd us less.

ADDISON.

His metaphysical poetry, unworthy the perspicuity and charm of this kind of poetry, I leave to the tomahawk of Johnson, that has deservedly cleft it asunder.

Waller had an elegant mind, and possessed the merit of giving the first polish to English versification. His compliments are often prettily shaped, and his measures agreeably polished; but they want fire, and possess not that rich inventive faculty, which constitutes the essence of poetry. Prior possessed genius, but is seldom more than pretty or humorous. His *Carmen Seculare*, like too many of our English odes, that run into extravagant lengths, is heavy and tedious.

Dryden, unquestionably, possessed a genius equal to any design in poetry, had he but

finished with elegance, what he conceived with energy: but even his ode on St. Cecilia's day, with all its fire, its vigour, its sublimity, is defective in taste; and has some meaner parts, that should never have appeared in so dignified a composition. The ode that aspires at public recitation, or musical representation, should possess nothing that can excite particular disgust.

Shenstone has been long acknowledged as the lady's poet; and his four lyrical ballads, and such of his odes as express the querulousness of the disappointed lover, are very agreeably plaintive: the sentiment is natural and pathetic; the numbers are soft and soothing. But many of his lyrical efforts are the productions of a man, always serenading the birds in his own garden, and whose views were bounded by the Leasowes.

Akenfide was a great poet; and, notwithstanding what Johnson says, possessed considerable merit, as a lyrist: of his Hymn to the

Naiads—which, though written in blank verse, I shall, with the permission of the critics, reckon a lyric poem,—it is little to say, that it displays much learning: the poetry is beautiful; and the mythological language no less appropriate, than brilliant: for he wrote, as believing the Platonic philosophy—to borrow his own language,—“to imitate the manner of “the Platonists, and to conform to their opinions*.”

This circumstance I the rather mention, to characterise that imitation, which has for its object the ancient mythology. In Akenfide's hymn to the Naiads, it is natural, for the reason just assigned: in Mason's ode on a similar subject, and in many other of his odes, it is improper and unnatural—though this classical affectation is crowded into our lyric poetry more frequently than into any other—and, unless a writer believes the ancient mythology,

* See Akenfide's notes to the Hymn to the Naiads, in the quarto edition of his poems.

or assumes the character of one who believes it;—or unless he speaks in a way of mere allusion, illustration, or comparison, it is always improper. Mason, however, is a fine lyric poet. But on this subject I have spoken at large in another place*.

There is a species of poetry, that separates itself from persons, and attaches itself to things; or, as Aristotle would express it, that renounces particulars, and abides by generals; different, however, widely different, from what has been called metaphysical poetry. For the latter is always labouring after greatness, but apprehends only conceits. Sublimity is obtained by selection: yet there nothing was rejected; but everything that was wild and tame, beautiful and ugly, heterogeneous and uniform, made a confused group: while unnatural associations, and endless amplifications, were rendered still further disgusting, by terms of

* In the *Necrology* for 1799, on the subject of the ancient *Mythology*, in the life of Mason, and on poetical *Imitation*, in the life of Dr. Farmer.

art, and the language of schoolmen. The kind of poetry, that I allude to, requires greatness of design, and vividness of conception; a capacity to choose, and to reject; a boldness, that does not lose itself in turgidity; a sprightliness, that wastes not itself in conceits; a modulation agreeable and harmonious; and a language not derived from the vulgarity of a shop, or the pedantry of schools.

Grongar Hill is a descriptive poem of this kind, and possesses considerable merit. Several of Maſon's odes are elegant; but Gray's, of all others, are the most sublime and finished.

These odes possess that character, which has been already noticed in the Greek lyristſ, Simonides, Bacchylides, Anacreon, and Sappho; though I speak only of their general character, as to subject. For of Gray's ode on the progress of poetry, I profess the same judgment with his ingenious critic *, that it far surpasses even PINDAR's, in grandeur of

* Wakefield's edition of Gray.

imagery, and in regularity of thought, even that most excellent ode *, of which it is, in parts, allowedly an imitation.

Whoever examines this exquisite poem with critical precision, will soon perceive, what boldness of design, what strength of figure, what grandeur of passion, what sublimity of sentiment, what richness and variety of modulation, what vigour and force of expression, unite in its composition *.

He will readily understand, that an extravagant figure, a cold expression, or an ordinary phrase, which might, perhaps, have escaped censure, in the dramatic, or even in the epic, can not pass unnoticed here; but must submit to severe animadversion.

This extreme fastidiousness is to be exercised on every branch of lyric poetry. For the ode makes its lighter excursions, no less than its

* First Pythiad of Pindar.

aspiring and more majestic flights. It displays no less variety in its subject and spirit, than in its language and measures. The tender ballad, the sprightly song, and even the humorous tale, possess the character of lyric poetry, no less than compositions, of higher pretensions, as to subject, and of more magnificent appearance, as to structure. Each, too, requires the air of novelty, the grace of variety; each must have the correctness of ease, and the charm of elegance. The sentiment, likewise, must be striking, yet unaffected; the versification easy, yet melodious: and, if the poet moralizes, he must distinguish dignity of sentiment, from the abstruseness of metaphysics, and a profundity of argumentation.

The management of encomiastic or complimentary poetry requires peculiar address. When a man undertakes to bestow panegyric, he is mounting a finely caparisoned courser, that may excite admiration; but which is, constitutionally, as it were, unruly, and may easily plunge the rider in disgrace. To pro-

ceed then with firmness, yet with dexterity; to know when to apply the rein, and when the curb; to bestow the just eulogium on modest merit, without offering adulation to insignificance; to express respect for genius and talents, without soothing literary empirics, and idle pretenders; to distinguish the simplicity of a generous and tender friendship, from the prudery and affectation of selfishness; and, above all, to be superior to private and mercenary views, while indulging in the admiration of others; is no very mean undertaking. It requires at once the ardour of a noble ambition, and the coolness of a well-tempered prudence; a penetration, that only follows experience; a gentleness, and greatness of soul, that must be the result of modesty and benevolence.

The ode, however, is peculiarly adapted to this kind of affections; and, in this point of view, by its brevity and variety, may be rendered the most useful of all the forms of poetry, as an epitome of private and public virtues;

Pindar — and who?

Horace!!!

and pray, good sense (xxvi) in what ode or
fragment
of the
Theban
Republic
Panegyric, in the hands of a mere rhym-
ster, is almost sure to sink into insipidity; in
the hands of a poet, it may swell into flattery.
Here, probably, Pindar and Horace grew ex-
travagant. Our Waller, whose talent was
principally exercised in compliments, unques-
tionably did. His ode to Vandyke, indeed,
is an elegant and just tribute to an ingenious
painter; and several other of his odes to the
fair sex, on love, beauty, and the like,
are posies, very agreeably put together, and
delightfully fragrant. But Waller's flowers
are often artificial. His panegyric on the
Lord Protector, and his address to Charles the
Second, on his return in 1660, contain much
good poetry. One or other of them, how-
ever, must have been the grossest flattery,—
perhaps, both; for Waller was a courtier by
profession: and every one knows his reply to
his royal master.

Flattery
I can
remember
no one
word,
that
justifies
the charge.
As to
Horace,
praise
worthy
to him
as an
amiable
gentleman

I add, in passing, that Dr. Johnson, in his

fine
country scene — thanks of thanks for his labours of
Epistles, of Odes, &c. — "sermones proprius" — of his
little translations or originals of light of social
growth, thanks for them too! — But as a
poet, a lyric poet, a companion of Pindar

or
son

attempts at lyric poetry, has, in my opinion, been very unsuccessful. The sentiment is but common; his measures are neither dignified nor sprightly; his language is neither stately nor animated. His imitations of Juvenal's Satires are, allowedly, excellent; but his five rural odes are indifferent manufactures; they contain no originality of thought, or gracefulness of diction; and will of themselves shew the reasons of Johnson's insensibility to the sublimity of Gray.

Thus much for the difficulty of lyric poetry, as exemplified in the writers of it. But, from the preceding observations the reader must not conclude, that I think highly of the following performances: far, very far, am I from great pretensions; and a fair method of reasoning must lead every reader to give me credit for sincerity. For I have gone into the above detail to shew the great difficulty and excellence of this style of poetry, and in some sort to vindicate its character. As to the following volume, its

*or the Author of the Essay^d 2^d (he he certainly is
 some work which he has - it won't do. No. 1 -*

very professions are moderate: it is, indeed, but an effort at the lighter exercises of lyric poetry; and how far even any of these pieces are successful attempts, the learned will judge.

But having gone thus far, I am now compelled to go further; and to meet such objections, as the mere reading of the preceding pages may, perhaps, prepare some readers to advance, had they not even occurred to them before.

For, first, it may be thought by some, that lyrical writing is not even congenial to the English language, or, at least, to English custom. And, undoubtedly, it obtained its name, at first, from its being chaunted to the lyre; as the ode itself, from its custom of being sung in public. But may not a similar objection be made to epic poetry; and, indeed, to almost every term, by which the different species of modern poetry are denominated? Tragedy, comedy, fatyre, are all foreign terms, and in their original character differed more materially from those kinds of verse, that now go

under such names, than the modern ode from the ancient.

Heroic poems, at least those of Homer, were anciently made up of detached passages, each of which was sung, and, at length, brought into one assemblage*. We still retain the term tragedy, though it is nothing less now, than what its name originally imported, a song of contention, the reward of which was a goat †. Comedy meant an ode or song repeated in the public streets; and satire was a poem in honour of Bacchus, attended by satyrs; of Greek origin, though its present form is Roman ‡.

As to lyrical poetry, it was not really essential to its character, to be sung to the lyre; it was enough, that it was adapted, or calculated for musical composition, and the accompaniment of the lyre: and unquestionably, the modern ode is better adapted to

* Vid *Ælian. Var. Histor. xiii.*

† *Carminē qui tragico vīlem certavit ob Hircum.*
Hor. Ars Poet.

‡ *Julii Scaliger Poetic. l. i. cap. v. xii.*

musical expression, than any species of verse : for, though I deny not, that in England it is the practice to enliven the worst versification with the best music—I allude to our operas and farces—yet music and poetry are, unquestionably, very kindred powers, and might still be made to express in union their agreeable and delightful harmonies *. Alexander's Feast, and the Ode to the Passions, as set to music by great composers, have shewn to admiration, how well the various modulations of lyric poetry are fitted to musical expression; and from Pope's Messiah (which, as to its character, is in fact, an ode), as lately set to music by a fine genius †, we collect what a natural connexion subsists between poetry and music; and how agreeably the various agitations of the passions may be impelled as well by musical sounds, as the modulations of verse. And let this suffice for the general objections to the ode.

As to particular objections that may be made to the *following* work; I know it may

* See Abbé du Bos's Critical Reflections on poetry, painting, and music. Vol. iii.

† Busby.

be urged, that some of the poems are rural and descriptive; whereas the author resides in the Great City.

But, will it necessarily follow, that the person, who lives in London at a particular period, must have resided there always? Suffice it to say, that of the years of my life, passed since I left college, the greater part have been spent entirely in the country; and, that since I have lived in town, I have usually past some part of the year in a course of constant rambling, or at the rural seat of some friend. The environs of London, too, will bear witness, how regular have been my solitary devotions in her modest retreats; so that, I hope, the critics will not treat my muse too ungallantly, at least, on this account, as though she were a mere London trollop, always sauntering, or gadding, about the streets of London, fallow with city smoke, and listening to the sound of Bow-bells.

But, though I have been an occasional wanderer, my habits and pursuits are those of

a retired, abstracted, though, I will add, of a somewhat trifling, desultory, and unprofitable student: and, that even my perambulations have been made subservient to some ardent pursuit. Independently, then, of early habits of indolence, the effects of which I still feel powerfully, my pursuits and manners are such, as rather belong to a solitary bookworm, than to one, agreeably relaxing in society. Those hours, which others have spent in the ordinary amusements of life, have been devoted by me to literary visions and speculations, as often, indeed, trifling, and unimportant, as dignified or serious.

This character discovers itself in all my publications; and may lead to an improper conclusion, on the style of my writings. Persons, who peruse books, are frequently supposed to read nothing besides: they must, forsooth, be mere imitators, because they are readers: and no writer must be allowed to have an original idea, or even a language, of his own, who has been accustomed to dissect

the opinions, or to be pleased with the writings, of others.

It will, perhaps, be recollected also by some, that a part of my present plan, is a critical work ; nor will it escape them, that even this preface, and some parts of the present volume, indicate a sort of poetical reading. And I will even acknowledge, that I have made it my study, to give a complexion and character to my poems, from my particular course of reading. But I must, at the same time, be allowed to protest, by all, that is dignified in pride, and sacred in indolence, that, with the exception of two or three poems, and of acknowledged translations, when I composed, I was as idle and disengaged, as any critic could wish a poet to be found ; too wild to be confined to books, and too confident (I hope I shall be forgiven that word), to be dictated to by pedantic rules, or to be shackled by criticism ; my rule being, when I meditate poetry, to lay aside writers of verse, no less than of prose, not excepting

even the critics ; to give the rein to my imagination,—how poor-soever it be ;— to impose no restraint on my feelings ; to let my thoughts run loose to what extent they please ; to seize the rudest ideas, while yet living and warm ; and to invite impressions, in a kind of extemporaneous observation, from real objects, and breathing pictures. With the exceptions, then, just mentioned, the resemblances can be few, and the parallelisms are all accidental. I have, indeed, afterwards corrected,—though I am aware that all my poems are imperfect,—and occasionally interspersed appropriate illustrations. Indeed, most of my little pieces are a kind of perambulatory amusements, meditated, when I have been rambling, and, generally, written on the spot. My prose writings, formerly published, consisting of the examination of the theological or political opinions of others, or being appeal to *facts*, I have necessarily made copious references to various authors : and, indeed, I hold it mean and dishonourable to drink silently at other peoples' sources, and to boast having discovered the fountain : to

receive information from other peoples' literary labours, without the ingenuousness to acknowledge it. To be content with the merit of industry,—even Newton pretended to nothing more—is often much safer than to challenge originality;—for those who have claimed originality the loudest, have been, sometimes, found to have the least pretensions to it.—Let my slight *poetical* effusions, too, be examined on their own professions.

I mean not, however, to assert that all my poems either in this volume, or in that which will follow, describe my genuine, at least my present feelings. Some are merely poetical or dramatic. Though I have, certainly, in some part of my life, felt as these pieces describe,—yet in those particular poems I speak not in my own person, I express not my present feelings. Those which express my own affections most powerfully are such, as will, perhaps, give to general readers the least pleasure. Any critic, who chooses, I will allow to call me either affected or melancholy. I do not

always write for the amusement of the critics. Such odes will find correspondent feelings in the breasts of some, whom I wish to please.— I have studied to make my volume as miscellaneous as possible, and am, indeed, frequently sportive, or dramatic, outwardly, when I am inwardly sad or serious. I wished to interest the thoughtful, the plaintive, the benevolent; and to please the young, the innocent, and the happy. I am free to acknowledge, then, that I have sometimes taken the poet's liberty, by introducing fiction, and speaking in a feigned character, though I no where sacrifice *sincerity* to fiction: I have, accordingly, to several prefixed an assumed title or name.

Whatever objections the critics make to these compositions, on reasons of taste, dislikes on metaphysical or political ground, will be here unreasonable. One or two odes contained in a former volume are republished in this, though altered, and, commonly shortened; and a few serious translations are added to give additional variety to the series. But on politics

I am totally silent. I proceed systematically; confining the present volume to subjects at least inoffensive, which will, I hope, afford some people amusement, and which ought to give no one offence.

But let no man misunderstand my meaning. In the second volume I shall attempt, at least, a bolder strain. The principles of freedom are too sacred, to be surrendered for trifles; too noble, to be exchanged for a song. Good policy is founded in justice, and ratified by experience. It is, as it were, the fostering nurse of great and good men *. It inspires a dignified magnanimity; it teaches the sublimest sentiments; it awakens the most generous passions; it gives splendour and brilliancy to language.

However men define the logic of taste, and wherever they fix the principles of judgment,

* Πολιτεια γαρ τροφη ανθρωπων εστι· καλη μιν αγαθων η δε εναντια κακων. Platonis Menexenus.

yet are there some affections so powerful and pervading, as to command, wherever they predominate, all the powers of poetry and eloquence. They open, as it were, the very springs of language, and urge it forward with an irresistible impetuosity; or, with the sweetest undulations of melody, produce all its refreshing and delightful varieties, all its most secret and enravishing charms.

They may be felt in the thunder of Demosthenes, in the strength of Thucidides, in the address of Pericles, and in the elegance of Lyfias; no less than in the sweet melodies of Plato, and in the simple beauty of Xenophon; the same, also, in poetry. Hence was derived the animation and grandeur of Tyrtæus, the ardour, the vehemence of Alcæus, the loftiness of Pindar, and the majesty of Stesichorus. Under the influence of good political principle, Milton, Marvel, Akenfide, Gray, and Mafon, raised their most rapturous notes, and produced their softest, and most finished compositions. The love of money and the love of pleasure

are the secret, but inveterate enemies of the soul, that take the citadel by stratagem, and then force every faculty into subjection. And pride, luxury, injustice, corruption, sap the foundation of a nation, and take possession of all its avenues. Then enters slavery, with her vile party of marauders, who plunder it of every thing that constitutes the pride of generosity, and the triumph of independence.

The nobler faculties of the mind are then compelled to submit, and the powers of speech are subdued into the service of the oppressor; while genius retires in disgust, or is seen wasting itself in meanness, or dreaming away life in listlessness and sensuality. The judicious, the upright critic is lost in the sniveling and unprincipled censurer, or the pusillanimous time-server; in the inflated boaster, or the flimsy egotist. The philosopher dwindles into a sophist, the patriot into a *politician*; the divine, perhaps, into a hypocrite; while the poet is content to become a retailer of trifles, if not the propagator of

scandal ; and, as impelled by his own interest, or the wishes of others, a pander to tyrants, and the sycophant of slaves. For where nothing is done worthy of honour and immortality, little will be written, but what is low and insignificant. Where profligacy is no disgrace, where virtue is not reckoned honour, the majesty of truth will give way to artifice and affectation ; the true spirit of eloquence to the pusillanimity and feebleness of flattery. To the loss of freedom, therefore, Longinus justly attributed the decay of genius, and the departure of all that is great and sublime in writing, from the Grecians*. When the sun of freedom set, science and taste gradually disappeared, and were succeeded by a night of dulness and ignorance.

But, though the principles of liberty have a natural tendency to unsophisticate the mind, to ennoble the passions, to elevate and embolden the imagination, and as a natural

consequence, to enliven and exalt poetry, yet it may not be necessary to circumscribe those principles by party politics, or temporary opinions. The best, the most independent political writers of Greece and Rome, were not retailers of scraps and fragments, but investigators of facts, and masters of principle: the most permanent politicians of England and of other countries have been men of the same character. Poets, I am aware, have been too much accustomed to misinterpret their own peculiar office, which is, undoubtedly, to please; and to comply with the most fashionable conceits and transient opiniatreties*. But, as feeling and judgment form a correct taste, so will principle sublime sentiment†. And there will always be found, I hope, in this country, persons, whose hearts will sympathise with genuine feeling, whose thoughts will be elevated with love of liberty. They

* Opiniatrety and velleity, are words used by Locke, to express what scarcely amounts to an opinion, or willing.

† See Burke on the Sublime and Beautiful. His Remarks on Taste are excellent; on the Sublime, they are at least defective.

will be pleased; and to please such persons will be no trifling or inglorious pursuit.

Let not, however, such observations be too hastily applied. Poetry is too fickle to be allowed to make large promises. The above observations, however, are just, as applied to other writers; and, for the same reason, though all my poems should be bad, such as are consecrated to liberty, will, I believe, be the best. Of those poems, principle shall form the basis; and they will be enlivened and coloured, as it were, with various topics, historical, æconomical, philological, critical, topographical, and commercial. There will also be an attempt, in that volume, at some pictures of poetry and painting, at a few descriptive poems, and at some of a miscellaneous, or satirical complexion. And thus much for objections, on the ground of politics.

No objection ought to be made to poetry, as such; merely on account of its particular measures. Poetry, in fact, considers these only as her accompaniment, her exterior, her frame; in

which she encloses her pictures, shaping and diversifying them, to suit her own purposes. She sometimes prefers a plain frame, to one ornamented; at other times she likes a round, and often a square frame. For, I will not pretend to say, that one form of verse is not better than another, or more suited to the talents of a particular writer: in the same manner, as in the stiff dress of the Dutch, the gaiety of the Spanish, the softness of the Italian, the clumsiness of the Portuguese, the grotesqueness of the Bohemian, and the majestic flow of the Turk, are many shades of difference; and there may exist certain laws of preference, founded on principles of taste, or reasons of convenience.

To speak the truth, it is not poetry, that stands opposed to prose, but verse: for poetry may exist in any form of verse, nay, even without it. And such appears the import of a disputed passage in Aristotle *.

* The learned Tyrwhit gives it a different meaning. But see Twining's modest and ingenious observations. Aristotle's Poetics. Notes 5th and 6th.

If the ideas presented by the senses are kept distinct; if the power of selection is asserted; if the images created by the imagination are naturally and beautifully disposed; if the provinces of wit, fancy, and invention, are judiciously preserved;—we have all the realities of poetry, and every thing beyond is an affair of private judgment, left to the discretion of the poet.

The loftiness of Milton, the grand simplicity of Shakspeare, the stateliness of Dryden, the spirit and elegance of Pope, the brilliancy and vigour of Akenfide, the melody and sublimity of Gray, each assumes a measure, not more suitably chosen, than properly and admirably applied.

And here I cannot forbear adding the remark, that some critics, when discoursing on the forms of verse, have spoken extravagantly, by exalting some favourite measure, and by degrading all the rest: and on some such prejudices as these—for I can call

such opinions by no better name—some have thought Pope no POET, and others reckon even Shakspeare only a WRITER of PLAYS.

With respect to myself, when I have at any time formed a little poetical picture in my mind, I have held myself at liberty to place it in any frame nearest my hand, or best adapted to my purpose. Sometimes I have even fashioned one myself on the spot, and, with permission, shall, perhaps, take greater liberties in my next volume. Where the subject is light, I have generally borrowed a light measure; for a serious subject, I have selected one more solemn. In a few instances, indeed, I have endeavoured to imitate the Greek modulation, as laid down by Dionysius of Halicarnassus; but more as it regards the relation of syllables, than the particular name or character of the verse. But here I have not been uniform, and, perhaps, my attempts have not succeeded. Every body, however, knows that the Greek versification is melodious to

yond any other, owing, indeed, in a great measure, to the structure of the language, which was uncommonly graceful. And were an English poet to accustom himself to a critical study of the choruses in Sophocles and Euripides, he would, I am persuaded, transfuse proportionably, richness and grace and sweetness, through his own numbers. To this we are indebted for the varied and inexpressibly charming melodies of Milton and Gray. When Professor Porson employs his learning and admirable talents, on this subject *, he will, I doubt not, at the same time, illustrate the poetry of the ancients, and render considerable assistance to modern poetry, in the article of versification. And let this suffice for the measures.

I have already alluded to the objection, that lyric poetry is apt to degenerate into flattery, like a noxious herb planted near the vine, that transfuses its own qualities into the juices, and that throws those who drink it to a kind of delirium.

Vid. Euripides Hecubam, a Porson. Præfat. sub fin.

But the objection, if just, applies to this sort of poetry not more than to every other species. Horace's Odes to Augustus favour not more strongly of adulation, than Virgil's *Æneid*. And much as Waller's poems possess of this quality, there is not less of the seasoning in Spenser's *Faery Queen*. If the ode has sometimes exceeded due bounds in paying compliments, we might easily shew, as well from the history of the French, as the English stage, that the drama has too often ruined public principle, by offering incense to the most odious characters: for poetry, it must be acknowledged, is a nimble instrument, that may quickly enough play syren airs:

—— Tut—let her alone.

She that hath feigned so many hundred gods,
Can easily feign some fable for her turn*.

and Plutarch was unquestionably well employed, when writing his excellent *Treatise, Concerning the manner in which a young*

* See that *pleasant old English Comedy*, entitled *LINGUA*, or the Combat of the Tongue and the Five Senses for Superiority, 1657.

man ought to read and understand poetical writings*.

But I cannot allow even this to be a serious objection. To nurse, and fan, as it were, virtuous principles; to give being and shape to the feelings of friendship; to enliven the social affections; to record what is useful or agreeable in art and science; to give worth its appropriate praise, or encouragement to modest merit; is, perhaps, better adapted to lyric poetry, than to any other species; and the arts and sciences in ancient times were considerably indebted to it. Amid the ravages of time, even sculpture and painting are perishable monuments, and have themselves been happy to avail themselves of the more durable records of poetry.

Ambition figh'd; she found it vain to trust
The faithless column, and the crumbling bust.

POPE.

The paintings of ancient Greece, also, are no more; and had the names of the artists

* Plutarchi Βιβλίον, Πως δει τον νεον Ποιημάτων ακρβειν.

not been consigned to a medal, or to writing, they too would have perished.

They had no poet, and are dead,
is not mere poetry.

This character of lyric poetry, then, is truly honourable; and has nothing in it either fulsome or disgusting. Where the subject is natural and justly exhibited, what some may choose to call the compliment, is but the liquid, mixt with different paints, to bring out one settled colour; or, perhaps, more properly, the varnish of the picture, that adds nothing to the figure, but only renders it more conspicuous.

But, whither tend these observations? To vindicate the principle of this kind of writing, not the conduct of any particular poet. The encomiastic spirit of lyric compositions, when properly managed, is a great excellence. Though we sometimes blame an art, when only the artist is to blame.

May not poets, therefore, and among the

rest, such as attempt Lyric Poetry, be permitted to claim independence, as well as other men? Praise, indeed, is one branch of their office*. Yet where they do not let themselves out for panegyrists, but conscientiously select their subjects, and follow the impulses of their own hearts, why must they be supposed to resign the pride of every honest mind? Dryden thought, and justly, that poets were bound by prescription, to employ on occasions of praise magnificence of words, to adorn their thoughts. The example was set by Pindar, and Dryden copied it. Their theory was good: if they erred, it was in practice.

And thus much for the observations on Lyric Poetry; which are introduced, indeed, in some degree, to illustrate the following

* Τίνα θεόν, τίς Ἡρώα,

Τίνα δ' ἀνδρὰ κέλαδ' ἴσομεν?

PIND. Ol. ii.

So Horace,

Dignum laude virum musa vetat mori. Lib. iv. 8.

and Theocritus,

Μῶσαι μὲν θεαὶ ἐντὶ, θεῶς θεαὶ αἰδοῦντι,

Ἀμμες δὲ ἔροτοί οἶδε, βροτῶς ἔροτοί αἰδῶμεν.

IDYL. XVI.

poems ; but more, as general and critical remarks, connected with my original design.

But what shall be said of the four last poems ? By some, satire is supposed to indicate a malignant disposition. And yet, if ever I expressed kindness in writing, these poems contain it: Their object is general utility. And if some persons are not the better for them, considerable pains have been taken to little purpose. The edge of the expression, indeed, is, occasionally, sharp; and may (as, in truth, it was intended it should) resemble satire. But to aim at correcting vice, and to protect others from injury, is allowed to be the proper office even of the moralist. And why should it be supposed to argue malignity ?

As to myself, (though the term poet will naturally be, sometimes, introduced, where the subject is poetry), no one can suppose, that a writer, without a degree of arrogance more imprudent than it would be disgusting, could put himself in too conspicuous a place.

The poet's character is placed very high; and to have made a personal application of it, would have been a perilous presumption. If, in any case, the word is appropriated, it is merely in a way of accommodation, or to shelter myself under a general name; in the same manner, as an inquirer into general truth may call himself a metaphysician; or a person but moderately acquainted with the branches of philosophy, may talk of himself as a mathematician.

Some persons have ascribed the indiscretions of their favourite writers, to the influence of poetry. Behold then an act of indulgence! and men of genius may have existed, who were glad to avail themselves of it. But in plea of any failings, I claim not benefit of poetry, but choose rather to say with Pope;
 "I wrote, because it amused me; I corrected,
 "because it was as pleasant to me to correct,
 "as to write; and I published, because I was
 "told, I might please such as it was a credit
 "to please." After many years of total indif-

ference to verse, I took to it again, (for it had been the weakness of my early years), and found in it more than I expected. I have derived from it some sources of agreeable reflection, when abroad; and have made it a retreat, when at home, sometimes from business, and sometimes from vexation. While, therefore, a debt of gratitude is still remaining, let every thing that favours of imprudence be put to its proper score.

One of our writers, indeed, says of poetry, "it found me poor, and left me so:" but I aspire not so high as to charge any calamity to it: for, though perhaps I may have indulged a few reveries, or run into a few vagaries, which, but for verse might have been avoided, yet I bring no further accusations against it. It has opened to me sources of enjoyment, that I prize beyond riches.

As to these four poems, indeed, I have not chosen to denominate them satires myself, and leave the reader to call them by what

name he chooses. The sharp point of Juvenal, and the dark severity of Persius, are called satires. Some poems of Horace, which at least have in view the same object, are of a more mild and playful spirit; and nearly approaching conversation, are called simply Discourses:

— Sermoni propiora.

The reader may call mine by what name he pleases. They are in general the reverse of satires. And these hints are left with the critics.

As to the poets, they will find, if I am not enthusiastic, that I can admire. To worship conceit, would be idle:—Criticism is the art of discrimination;—but when excellence preponderates, it may challenge praise. In works of real genius, Addison's rule, "to dwell rather on excellencies than imperfections," is better than the rule of meaner critics. If, then, I now extol lyric poetry, other forms are not overlooked, but shall receive due

respect, hereafter. Then, too, I will do justice to mythology; but supply its place, in this volume, by personification. The mythology of the eastern poets was simple; and allegory was to them what fable was to the Greeks and Romans*. The northern mythology was poetical, yet no trace of it is in Ossian†. Little mythology is in our Thomson; personification fills its place in Collins.

Damus accipimusq; vicissim.

One word relative to the delay of this publication: and an apology, is, certainly, due, if not to the world at large, who would probably endure the loss of these poems without murmuring, at least to my friends and subscribers. For I have certainly trifled with my engagements, if not with their patience;

* Vid. Lowth, Poes. Hebr. Præl. 8, 9, 10. Jones. Poes. Asiatic. part. 3, cap. 5, 9. And, as being entirely theological, *Carmen Persicum, nec non Arabicum*, translated and published by J. Uri, 1770.

† It has been observed, that the Gaelic poets always keep the actions of their gods and heroes distinct. Pref. to Ossian.

and so truly blame-worthy has been my dilatoriness, that in the very act of apologizing, I must be my own accuser. Apologizing is at all times an irksome and unpleasant business; but it is generally more painful to him who is constrained to make it, than even to him who has patience to hear it.

There exists, then, a kind of constitutional fancy-working, called castle-building,—in which idle persons are the most prompt labourers—a ridiculous and flippant art, beginning in conceits, and terminating in literary derangements. A castle-builder (and a very moderate portion of talent will form one) may soon get perplexed with heterogeneous pursuits, and be turned aside from the calls of regular industry. He resembles a traveller, who is ever striking into bye-roads; at one time amusing himself in fields and gardens; at others bewildering himself in labyrinths; and then stumbling over rocks, or looking down precipices; when, on striking again into the old track, he finds himself but in the middle of

the road, when he ought to have arrived at his journey's end.—I confess I have had my share of this trifling sort of industry.

And now while at confessions, I will confess more. To the same spirit it is owing, that I have been too easily prevailed on to engage in publications, by no means congenial to this work; but in some sort at variance with it, as well as with each other. Such, more particularly, were biographies, and a book on juries, and some other matters. The former were entirely concerned with the works of literary persons, and necessarily led on to a minute investigation of writings and controversies, with which I had previously but an imperfect acquaintance. The latter obliged me to read over political and legal writers, in order to elucidate principles, or to make fair deductions. And pursuits of so opposite a nature are apt to form a kind of struggle in the mind, that ends in the defeat of all steady resolution: then succeed perplexity and confusion; which are followed, too often, by languor and indifference.

With respect to the present work, persons of discernment will, I hope, exercise candour; for, how imperfectly soever conducted, it will be found to be of considerable magnitude and nicety. The poetical department attempts, at least, great variety;—I mean not of measures, which are, comparatively, of trifling consideration,—but of subject and design. It pursues a track of reading, not hastily entered upon, nor to be relinquished at random: and, notwithstanding numerous interruptions and acknowledged imperfections, what is here really executed is of some extent; no part being made up of the loose scraps of ingenious prowlers, or the dainty bits of learned caterers. I have no jackals among *men of quality*, or poor scholars to provide me with smart anecdotes, fashionable tattle, or learned notes. Superficial talking writers, (if I may use the expression) who take every thing at second-hand, cannot know how to estimate a work of regular and assiduous study; and drawing their opinions and authorities from sources, that lie nearest their hand, how can they do otherwise, than form conclusions in regard to

others, from their own conduct? But writers who take pains themselves, have rules by which they will fairly estimate the labours of others: and, I think, such persons will perceive, though this volume attempts lighter subjects, that it discovers a course of reading both of ancient and modern authors, not to be dispatched too hastily; the four last poems, and the introductory one particularly. Nor are the opinions concerning modern poets, I mean of such as are living, taken from others: it seemed incumbent on me to read them over entirely, with the exception of three or four, whom I have, as yet, but partially read; and this, merely to insert their characters in two or three pages: an undertaking, indeed, of mere application, which may, therefore, be spoken of without vanity. The second volume, too, though on different topics, will pursue nearly the same plan. The five last poems will be on various subjects; interspersed with notes, as the present, though but little connected with poetry and poets. A considerable part of this volume is composed.

The critical part, too, which will occupy one of the next volumes, enters on a large field of inquiry; in which, the language, the poetry, and mythology of various nations will be examined. I have prevailed, too, on myself, to recede from my original plan, though formed at first after much serious reflection, and preparatory arrangements: what at first were only intended as hints to young persons, agreeably to a specimen published in the Monthly Magazine, two or three years ago, will take a more serious and diversified form, and be adapted to general readers*.

But as reformation ought to accompany repentance, and I have just avowed myself a penitent, I shall form suitable resolutions, and amend my conduct. One resolution will be, to engage in no extraneous publications, till I have fairly delivered the remainder of this into the hands of its rightful owners. For

* I shall also subjoin a translation of a celebrated treatise of Plutarch's, with notes, as being immediately connected with my work.

the present, therefore, I entirely take my leave of biography*, and consider myself as the exclusive property of the subscribers to this work.

* A small biographical work (should it be published) may be excepted. After publishing the ingenious Robert Robinson's life, I hinted in the Monthly Magazine, that at a proper time I should say something concerning Dr. Farmer; having then meditated a biographical work, with a view to which my reading had been directed, and for which some preparations had been made; and there such a sketch would have properly had its place. Since then, a work has been planned by the publisher of that magazine, to which I was strongly solicited to contribute, and did contribute two articles. I cannot mean the smallest reflection on the writers in that work, but the hint is dropped merely as an intimation, that whatever I undertake of a biographical work in future, originated in my own mind; that it aims at no interference with other works, being of such a kind, indeed, as cannot clash with any other; and having in view an object that I could not pursue conjointly with others: and this I mentioned to the editor of the Necrology, at the time he applied to me for communications. The work will not be annual, but will probably be confined to a single volume, authenticated with my own name, and the proper authorities.

With respect to another work published by the same person, called *Public Living Characters*, I must beg leave to say a word. A REVIEW employed for the purpose of misrepresentation, gave me the honour of being one of the principal writers in the first volume of that work.

Concerning the persons mentioned in this volume, a closing observation, which should have been introduced before, shall be made. That the expressions of respect, there introduced, can be of small value to any individual, shall be readily allowed. By improper inferences, however, that little would be rendered less. Respect is ever due to the splendour of genius, to the energy of talents, to the authority of learning, and to the majesty of virtue : and to feel this sentiment towards some of the most distinguished persons in the country, is my chief pride. This, too, is spoken in the hearing of some who possess the conviction,

This was a known falsehood, which I beg leave to correct. To shew my respect for the talents and writings of two living characters, I composed two articles in the second volume, and no more ; and after the public and inaccurate declaration of such vile contemptible scribblers, it was very indiscreet in me to compose even them. I mean no censure on any part of PUBLIC CHARACTERS, except what I wrote myself ; but wish it may be a useful as well as a public work : however, private and very serious reasons occur, for availing myself of this opportunity to declare, that I have no concern in it. I wish, too, my subscribers to be assured that I am differently employed ; nor should I indeed do any credit to a publication, for which I am, at present, totally unqualified.

that to them the writer cannot use flattery. If their names; then, are unnoticed in this volume, it is because the subjects, and they are among such as most deeply interest my heart, find a more appropriate place in the next: and a hint has been dropped on the plan of that volume, in order to impress the reader with this idea. The small merit then of these poems, would be considerably diminished, by the inference, that a less respect is in the author's mind, where the greatest is due; an inference, that would be no less injurious to his character, than hurtful to his feelings.

With regard to the ladies, whose names are mentioned in this or a former volume, let it be publicly understood, as it has always been privately, that my language has been the expression of simple, though sincere, respect. To a powerful affection, many years indulged, and to a fondness for retirement, I am certainly indebted for a revival of some poetical feelings: when the heart is most subdued, it

sometimes loves to worship in silence. These feelings may, perhaps, since have broken out into verse; but while immediately under the influence of that softness, I made no re-buses, and sent about no poetical billets doux; a confession, it is true, not of a very gallant poet: but reasons present themselves for my acknowledging, that, in print, just enough is delivered to secure me from the imputation of insincerity, and no more. The mention of names may, perhaps, by some be considered imprudent; but the moral and intellectual qualities that entitle one sex to respect or esteem, will, also, justly entitle the other: and where a writer acts not without reasons, and where, by the parties concerned, those reasons are not disapproved, there is no ground for censure.

In this case, then, what has been done? The reverse, it is true, of our Trouvadours, and poets of romance. Their ladies were nameless, and often ideal. To them, however, to be in love was essential; and so far gone was

one, as to fall violently in love with a lady whom he never saw. However, (so ambitious was he to be thought, both in life and death, a true poet) after admission to her presence, and declaring, that he died satisfied, he expired at her feet*. Was not our Dr. Donne, also, sufficiently poetical? "Though he had never seen Mrs. ^{Dunry}~~Donne~~, (it is Dryden's observation) he rendered her immortal in his ANNIVERSARIES: and I," as that great poet continues to observe, "have had the same fortune:" for Dryden published a quarto poem, in praise of the countess of Abingdon, whom he never saw†.

In such instances, then, if simple sincerity can triumph over poetry, may I not claim one advantage over these poets? My ladies have real names. I have seen,—have respected them: and no lady, I hope, will be offended.

* For an account of this lover see the preface to the first volume of Fableaux.

† See Dryden's preface to Walsh's Dialogues concerning women, and his dedication to Eleonora.

at so honest a declaration. For love is, sometimes, said to be blind, though respect never is. But, to speak the truth, on reading Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin's Rights of Woman, I was disposed, and still am, to admire female talents, in proportion as such writers as Rousseau, Gregory, and Fordyce, under-rate them. In that work, perhaps, a great principle is somewhat strained; but still we behold the production of a great mind, and of one who wrote from principle. Dryden remarks, "that he had seen more heroines than heroes." Ancient * and more modern authorities are still further confirmed by many living testimonies; and, in proportion as they are acted upon, will shew, that the perfecting of the female understanding promotes

* Plutarch among the Greeks, and Valerius Maximus among the Romans, have written on this subject; and many treatises have been published by the Italians. The completest and most judicious work that I have read on this subject, I speak of it as a book of facts, is entitled an essay on the character, manners, and genius of women in different countries, by M. Thomas. The English translation by Ruffel is considerably enlarged, and printed for Robinsons.

at once the truest morals, and the best interests of society; a sentiment, that I hold with all the coldness of dispassionate inquiry, but with all the firmness of a settled belief.

And now, after such a detail, one apology may seem to require another. What shall I, then, say? for, truly, to be compelled to make a prolix apology is as wearisome, as struggling through a wilderness on a sultry day. It is natural, then, and in some cases necessary, for one who violates an engagement (and here I close the business), to look around for a reasonable excuse: whether what has been made be such, is left to the consideration of my subscribers. Some may, perhaps, look back on the paper of proposals (I am afraid of looking at it myself), and be reminded, how slow I am in the fulfilment of promises; that, even yet, I have not half fulfilled them. The best, therefore, has been made of a bad business: and I have laid before the reader the extent of my plan, the state of my mind, and some reasons for my delay.

But enough—If I can confide in my health, as well as I can in the kindness of my friends, the whole work will be finished in three quarters of a year: and happy shall I be of an opportunity, at a future period, to cancel every syllable of this preface, that relates to me or my concerns! For in egotism there is an offensive air, though it became necessary to have recourse to it on the present occasion. Such persons, as I wish to understand it, will perceive its propriety; and only to those whom it concerns, is it addressed: the necessity no longer existing, the sooner **THE HERO OF HIS OWN TALE** is forgotten the better.

P. S. I beg leave to observe that, besides the two or three poems noticed in this volume, as corrected from Odes and Elegies published in 1792, there also will be found one or two small pieces from that volume, though not specified here. The remainder will be corrected and printed in the second volume. Three in the following volume have appeared before in the Anthology printed at Bristol, and one of them in the Monthly Magazine; all the above, I think, with my name. *The Nightingale*, p. 66, was printed about six or seven years ago, in the Nottingham Herald; I believe, without a name. *The Harper*, also, p. 110, has been printed, though without my name, in *Recreations in Agriculture, Natural History, &c.* by that ingenious and experienced agriculturist, Dr. James Anderson.

